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Pheasant change suggested

By LAUREN DONOVAN, Bismarck Tribune

Down in Mott country, the pheasant capital of the Midwest, they can put the champagne on ice.

With Gov. John Hoeven's approval, pheasant season will open one week earlier next fall and go into a rotation to allow upland bird and waterfowl seasons consecutive opening weekends.

Out where pheasants fly, State Game and Fish Commissioner Dean Hildebrand's compromise plan that opens pheasant hunting earlier many years, while avoiding a conflict with the opening of waterfowl hunting, is hailed as good news both for hunters and for the communities that host them.

Hildebrand made the recommendation to the governor's office earlier this week.

Pat Candrian, who manages the Cannonball Co. pheasant hunt operation at Regent, said he'd been lobbying for a change that opened pheasant season the first Saturday of every October.

Instead, Hildebrand's plan, which is pending Hoeven's stamp, will open the season the Saturday after waterfowl opening, a date set by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to coincide with the weekend in either September or October closest to the first Saturday in October.

Some years, like 2002, that means an extra early week for ringnecks starting Oct. 5, because waterfowl opens Sept. 28.

"Just for this little company, that one week will mean an additional \$100,000," Candrian said.

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mean an additional \$100,000, Candrian said.  
 "It's big bucks."

In 2003, pheasants won't be legal until Oct. 11, because waterfowl opens Oct. 4.

The way it works out, pheasant opener will be open a week earlier than the current second Saturday in October half the time.

Candrian said he's happy for the 50 percent improvement, but he'll keep working for the other half.

Hildebrand said he doesn't want to move the pheasant opener to a static date that would sometimes conflict with the waterfowl opener because many hunters like to take advantage of both opening weekends.

"It makes a lot of sense," Hildebrand said.

Bob Harms, chief counsel for Hoeven, said the governor likes the plan because it avoids that very conflict, but wants to give staff an opportunity to assess its strengths and weaknesses before making it official.

"I'm assuming he will implement it. It moves in a direction that the governor favors," Harms said.

Harms said the governor's view is that earlier hunting is good for the state's economy and gets hunters out in the field during nicer October weather.

Hoeven was out of the office and not available for comment.

Hildebrand said his plan makes good financial sense at no biological risk to the pheasants themselves.

He said there is some concern that late hatched birds won't exhibit their distinctive male coloring any earlier.

"They're only shooting an identifiable rooster. If you can't tell, don't shoot," Hildebrand said.

Game and Fish will write the hunting

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Came and then the wife the naming  
proclamation for the governor's signature.

Harms said the department may get more input  
during regional advisory board meetings.

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